

Newport County Unified High School Exploratory Committee Minutes

4:00 -5:45 PM - Thursday, January 2, 2014

Attendees

Present: Richard P. Adams, Middletown Town Council; Marco T. Camacho/ (Alternate); Newport City Council; Kellie E. DiPalma, Middletown School Committee; Sandra J. Flowers, Newport School Committee; Justin S. McLaughlin, Newport City Council, Vice Chair; Naomi L. Neville, Newport City Council; Robert B. Power, Newport School Committee; Barbara A. VonVillas, Middletown Town Council, Chair

Not Present: William R. O'Connell, Middletown School Committee

Review of previous activities

Barbara VonVillas began the meeting with thanks to those who have been involved since 2005.

The history of discussions to create a regionalized school district was summarized with particular attention to commentary by members of previous regionalization committees. It was noted that these discussions ended in no concrete action. The summary of previous activities is attached. The committee agreed that it does not wish to repeat the previous discussions but will build upon that work, the goal being to get to referendum in November 2014.

A discussion followed of the activities undertaken July - December 2013 which included various discussions with municipal and school representatives among others.

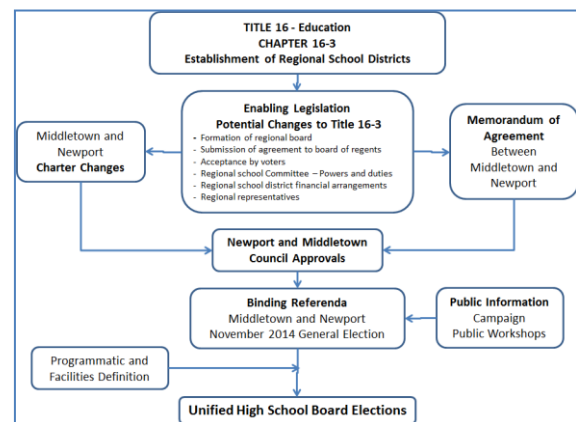
General Discussion of Issues and Process

The Committee began with a general discussion of facilities, if any, necessary to establish a Unified High School. It was noted that the first question asked by citizens would be related to facilities and costs. Concern was expressed that it took 12 years to approve and build the Pell School, and there should be a transition to a Unified High School District before consideration of new or changed facilities.

It was suggested that consideration should be given to selling the Rogers HS property and committing the profits to education. A discussion of transition plan elements followed. Discussion of excess school capacities elicited suggestions including sending Newport students to Middletown HS and other possible scenarios. It was agreed that, in general, unification of the high schools should precede consideration of, and planning for, any new facilities.

As a basis for discussion, a high-level sketch of the process to be followed was presented, emphasizing the approvals necessary by the City/Town Councils of enabling legislation and a referendum question.

Committee members discussed the importance of ensuring clarity that the Exploratory Committee was created outside the prescribed regionalization process of the existing legislation (RIGL 16-3).



Based on the advice of counsel it was considered necessary to use terminology other than that of Title 16-3. Thus, the name of the committee and representation were chosen to contrast with existing Title 16-3 provisions. Enabling legislation will be submitted to the RI General Assembly to meet the specific needs of the communities as required to create a Unified HS District.

Proposed Future Activities

The Committee agreed that the next meeting would focus on enabling legislation. Because some members were unfamiliar with Title 16-3, a copy will be sent to each member, and Committee members were asked to prepare comments and questions for the next meeting, and modifications to Title 16-3 that they thought necessary.

**Newport County Unified High School
Exploratory Committee
Minutes**

4:00 -5:45 PM - Thursday, January 2, 2014

The Committee engaged in a general discussion of regionalization agreements or Memoranda of Understanding or Agreement (MOU or MOA) from other successful regionalization processes including what they should include such as governance, funding, and facility financing and other matters to be considered and agreed upon by the communities.

Proposed timeline

A general discussion of required events and milestones was held. It was agreed that a draft calendar of events would be available at the next meeting. The pacing event is submission of a referenda question to the voters at the November 2014 election.

Proposed Meetings Calendar

It was suggested that there would need to be frequent meetings early in the process to enable Committee members to prepare the submissions and make the decisions necessary to present a November referendum to the citizens.

The Committee agreed to meet twice each month. The next meeting would be on Thursday, January 23 with a following meeting on Monday, February 10. Both meetings would be scheduled for 6-8 PM with a location to be determined.

Proposed agendas

Committee members were asked to submit agenda items by January 17th.

Agreed Items

Item	To Do	By Whom?	When?
Draft Calendar & Timeline	Create a calendar of events for distribution to Committee members	VonVillas	Next meeting 1/23/2014
Enabling Legislation Input	Mark up RIGL 16-3 to show the changes needed. This will provide the basis of enabling legislation input to Senator DiPalma	All Members	Next meeting 1/23/2014 and subsequent

Election of officers

Barbara VonVillas and Justin McLaughlin were unanimously elected Chair and Vice-Chair, respectively.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:45 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,



Richard Adams

**Newport County Unified High School
Exploratory Committee
Minutes**

4:00 -5:45 PM - Thursday, January 2, 2014

An Abbreviated History of School System Regionalization Discussions	
Pre 2009	The original Aquidneck Island School/Municipal Advisory Committee was started in 2005 following the "famous tent meeting" in Portsmouth and after Newport and Middletown had gone through some difficulties in trying to balance their budgets. ...members ... looked initially at ways of collaborating. ... next commissioned our first RIPEC report...."
June 29, 2009	RIPEC released the Aquidneck Island Consolidation Feasibility Study. Focus was K-12 school regionalization. Study found declining enrollments and excess building capacity; it showed that "opportunities exist to generate significant savings to the three districts through consolidation, while providing enhanced educational opportunities," , dependent on governmental and administrative efficiency and effectiveness.
July 6, 2009	Dr. Shoemaker commented, "One course of action is to take no action and accept the status quo, but if the RIPEC projections are correct and each school has an enlarging spending gap, the three districts will have little choice but to cut academic and extracurricular programs."
	He later stated, "before we can get a 'buy-in' from each of the communities, I think the cost/student for each community has to be nearly equal. The current Newport School Committee inherited a major financial liability - namely lifetime healthcare benefits for many of its retirees (OPEB). From my analysis Newport has a higher cost/perstudent because of its benefit package for retirees." He added, "As to why Newport has the highest costs/student, it would appear that Newport's OPEB obligation is the main reason."
	He concluded, "Because of Portsmouth's recent construction of a new gym, early impressions are that this high school will continue as it is....To reiterate, if regionalization is to be meaningful we need to merge 2 high schools. I feel this issue has to be resolved before going to the public and recommending regionalization.
Sept. 23, 2009	Dr. Shoe: "It seems to me that to be fair, we should include in each community's expenditure the amount we pay to retirees up to 65, but that the cost of Newport's over 65 program should be handled separately."
Nov. 17, 2009	Justin McLaughlin to Dr. Shoe: After identifying the three to five main points you want your audience to take away, and relying on the credibility that the study's author commands, you can select the information you need to present to support those points. Frequently, a briefer spends too much time anticipating the augments of a small number in the audience who may not agree with his conclusions, and in an attempt to convince them, spends too much time and energy trying to build a case that will change their minds, and as a result runs the risk of losing the attention of the bulk of the audience who aren't interested in the level of detail needed to make that case. In order to hold an audience's attention, one needs to stay at a relatively constant level of details (which generally shouldn't be very detailed); getting too detailed usually confuses an audience and a confused audience is not hearing your message. I think the building blocks of what you want to convey include the following:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The economic outlook is dismal.

**Newport County Unified High School
Exploratory Committee
Minutes**

4:00 -5:45 PM - Thursday, January 2, 2014

An Abbreviated History of School System Regionalization Discussions	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost of operating our schools is projected to grow at a rate greater than municipalities are likely to be able (or willing) to support.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School enrollments have declined and are expected to continue to decline.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School facility excess capacity exists today and is expected grow.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal budgets are expected to be stressed by a variety of factors for the foreseeable future.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal, state and federal funding of education is likely to decrease for a variety of reasons.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School committees need to find ways to save money while ensuring continuing delivery of high-quality education.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The geography of Aquidneck Island lends itself to consolidation of schools.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The RIPEC study documents, regardless of the assumptions used, that the projected funding level needed to continue to deliver high-quality education to all students will not be available.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The RIPEC study shows Aquidneck Island communities can save substantial amounts of money by entering into school collaboration and consolidation.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The RIPEC study has fully characterized the existing baseline and then developed five consolidation scenarios
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The RIPEC study has fully characterized the existing baseline and then developed five consolidation scenarios in order to demonstrate the potential financial benefits to each of the Aquidneck Island communities at various levels of collaboration and consolidation.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preliminary examination of available data suggests that school consolidation would have significant educational benefit in addition to the cost savings shown by the analysis contained in the RIPEC study:
	As pretty and technically interesting the charts and plots are, it would be better to include a photograph of a modern 21st century high school as a means of getting people's attention and reinforcing the message that there is significant benefit to be gained by consolidating.
	A successful communications campaign (like a political campaign) involves a focused message and repetition. A succinct article now that makes and reinforces key concepts will lay a foundation for future installments.
Dec. 7, 2009	A proposal was prepared for the formation of a Regional Planning Committee; the proposal did not receive support.
Jan. 2010	Proposal for NESDEC education study was criticized for its cost, especially in light of the absence of information related to educational programming.
Feb. 24, 2010	Meeting of Special House Commission to Study Regionalizing and/or Combining Administrative and Other functions of the Newport, Portsmouth, and Middletown School Systems. There was discussion of the RIPEC study, the Aquidneck Island Advisory Group, and a review of the laws relating to regionalization.

**Newport County Unified High School
Exploratory Committee
Minutes**

4:00 -5:45 PM - Thursday, January 2, 2014

An Abbreviated History of School System Regionalization Discussions	
Apr. 5, 2010	Guest speaker at Advisory Committee meeting: Chariho Superintendent. Bristol-Warren and Exeter-West Greenwich visitors attended another meeting. All gave reflections of regionalization in their districts: enabling legislation, governance, funding, and educational benefits.
May 1, 2010	Middletown Town Council appoints Regionalization Committee - BVV, Chris Semonelli, Bill Flynn, Mike Pinto, Kellie DiPalma, Liana Fenton. Meetings to review implications for Middletown.
June 7, 2010	Discussion of . NESDEC response to proposal for educational study as well as pledges of financial support.
Aug. 2, 2010	Initial fact-finding meeting with NESDEC reps. "Art Bettencourt emphasized the primary reason for consolidating should be educational benefit." Later mention that RIPEC report full of graphs difficult to understand. Simplify. Also, mention of Newport's OPEB liability.
Sept. 13, 2010	NESDEC Enrollment Update. Reflects decreases in public school enrollment and increases in non-public school enrollment.
Dec. 21, 2010	Middletown Regionalization Committee files report, makes recommendations. TC supports 2 of 4 recommendations.
Jan. 10, 2011	RIPEC released an Updated Revenue Forecast as well as a Consolidation and Feasibility Study Update.
Jan.23, 2011	NESDEC Study released. Focused mostly on financial implications. Negative response.
Feb. 7, 2011	Forum on School Funding attended by congressional representatives and other political figures.
Mar. 2011	BVV "The Effects of Enrollment on Quality Education Grades 9-12"
Mar. 3, 2011	Work plan reviewed for NESDEC corrected report - broadened focus.
Mar. 15, 2011	Motion for non-binding referendum proposed to Middletown Town Council. Motion defeated.
Apr. 13, 2011	Draft revised/updated NESDEC report with appendix
Apr. 29, 2011	NESDEC Report released with Technical Appendix